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"Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue": Recent Literature in Communist Studies

Stephen A. Smith: The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism, Oxford 2014, ISBN 978-0-19-960205-6, pp. 658.

Ralf Hoffrogge: Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution: Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement, Leiden/Boston 2014, ISBN 978-90-04-21921-2, pp. xv, 253.

Marcel Bois: Kommunisten gegen Hitler und Stalin: Die Linke Opposition der KPD in der Weimarer Republik. Eine Gesamtdarstellung, Berlin 2014, ISBN 978-3-8375-1282-3.

Bernhard H. Bayerlein et al. (eds): Deutschland, Russland, Komintern: Neue Perspektiven auf die Geschichte der KPD und die Deutsch-Russischen Beziehungen, Vol. 1: Überblicke, Analysen, Diskussionen, vol. 2: Dokumente (1918–1933), vol. 3: Dokumente (1933–43), Berlin 2014, pp. 1, 840.

Jacob A. Zumoff: The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929, Leiden/Boston 2014, ISBN 978-90-04-21960-1, pp. 443.

Henning Grunwald, Courtroom to Revolutionary Stage. Performance and Ideology in Weimar Political Trials, Oxford 2012, ISBN 978-0-19-960904-8, pp. 252.

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Communism as History

After the fall of Soviet communism, the loudest voice reaching a wider audience was one of moral condemnation. The most prominent example of this was the French historian Stéphane Courtois' *Black Book of Communism*.[1] In Germany, too, the end of communism witnessed a mood of understandable moral condemnation. And, more widely, the revival of totalitarian theory in the 1990s gained official sanction with the publication of the multivolume Enquette Commission report into the "second German dictatorship."[2] There were undoubtedly crimes, terror and repression throughout the lifespan of the Soviet Union, China and the post-1945 regimes in Eastern Europe, and totalitarian theory—and its derivatives—is not without scholarly merit; although the model was often used as a vehicle for Western anti-communism as much as an analytical framework *per se*. Yet, at least in the opinion of this reviewer, the agenda to historicise communism will lead to a fuller understanding of the origins and development of communism in the "Age of Extremes" (Hobsbawm). There is also a need to understand communism's seductive attractions and early idealism as well as its Stalinist transformation, post-Stalinist stagnation and decline and also to account for China's path from Mao to contemporary global economic giant. At the forefront of the agenda to historicise communism was the late, great Hermann Weber and the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* he founded in 1993 to publish research on global communism.[3]

Communism in Power

The aim of understanding communism by seeing it in the round, identifying "the diversity that existed alongside the uniformity," is the explicit call of Stephen A. Smith, the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism.* Smith calls for research that, "should seek to avoid moralizing condemnation, one the one hand, and credulous apologetics, on

1 Stéphane Courtois et al.: The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, and Repression, Cambridge 1999; see also Francois Furet: The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century, London 1999.

2 For a wider discussion of totalitarian theory and the German Democratic Republic, see Corey Ross: The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR, London 2002, pp. 20–25; see also Mike Dennis/Norman LaPorte: State and Minorities in Communist East Germany, Oxford 2011, pp. 12ff.

3 See also Hermann Weber: Zehn Jahre Historische Kommunismusforschung: Leistung, Defizit, Perspektiven, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 50:4 (2002), pp. 611–633.

the other."[4] By and large, this is the spirit that runs through this mighty tome in which 36 chapters (including the introduction) are divided into six subsections and spill of over 650 informative and readable pages. The tone is set by Smith's introduction, which begins by reminding us that October 1917 inspired the belief that humankind could make a new and better world, free of classes and capitalist exploitation.[5] This idealism expanded well beyond the ranks the Bolsheviks and informed (admittedly minority) perceptions globally—even in post-1918 Britain.[6] But the lived-reality of communism is never far away. As Smith details, communism's authoritarianism saw the crushing of dissert and, in Soviet Russia, the ending of the radical experiment in workers' democracy "from below" in 1917/18 was replaced by the enduring Soviet model of one-party dictatorship which took shape by 1921.[7] In reality, what was on offer was not the radical democracy and egalitarianism foreign admirers identified with well into the second half of the century; but it did serve as a more prosaic model for rapid economic and social transformation in the developing world. Here there was an upside: after 1945 Soviet Russia and, from 1949, communist China, offered their support to Marxist inflected nationalisms which sought to end colonialism and, more widely, racism. A discussion of this topic peppers many of chapters. It is also a theme which runs throughout most of the books under review: the seeming alternative to global capitalism and the geopolitical West offered by communism.

Smith's introduction is also able to provide the reader with what amounts to a typology of conditions producing communist states. "If one is looking for a single cause of communist revolution," he observes, "it is war." Almost no state was able to build on traditions of democracy, civil liberties or the rule of law (the exception was Czechoslovakia); almost every communist state inherited a "backward" agrarian-dominated economy (the exceptions were Czechoslovakia and East Germany); and when "successful" revolutions survived to become states—from Russia and China to Vietnam and Cuba—there inheritance was economic "backwardness," political tyranny and social inequality; in other cases, colonial rule had inflamed national liberation movements.[8] Yet, if violence before, during and after these revolutions was a common theme, then the collapse of Soviet-styled communism was surprisingly peaceful in Eastern Europe, especially given the

4 Stephen Smith: The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism, Oxford 2014, pp. 32–33.

5 On this point, see also Michael Buckmiller: Bilanz eines russisch-deutschen Forschungsprojekt, in: Michael Buckmiller/Klaus Meschkat (eds.): Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale: Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt, Berlin 2007, pp. 19–20.

6 See, for example, Ian Bullock: Romancing the Revolution: The Myth of Soviet Democracy and the British Left, Alberta 2011.

7 Stephen Smith, Oxford Handbook, pp. 7–8; see also his impressive: The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2002.

8 Stephen Smith, Oxford Handbook, pp. 17, 23.

militarised Cold War tensions underpinning American anti-communism until the arrival of Gorbachev in the mid-1980s.[9] Smith also draws on his dual specialisms of Soviet and Chinese communist history to engage with the destructive power of Gorbachev's parallel political and economic reforms, observing that the policy choice in China of opting for economic reform driven by the party dictatorship may well be the key to understanding communism's—or, more accurately, the party's—survival and significance today.[10]

Although organised in subsections (or "Parts", as the editor terms them) the essays in the *Handbook* overlap in their themes and topics as they inform the reader about communism as a (dis)functional system of governance which grew out of the idealistic aims informing a diversity of social movements. The collection begins with a section entitled "Ideology," which covers the midwives of communism, Marx and Engels (Paresh Chattopadhyay), Leninism (Lars T. Lih), Stalinism (Kevin McDermott) and Maoism (Timothy Cheek). To quote one authority on both Marxism and communism, "Some political movements (such as liberalism) exist in reality before they exist in the mind. Communism on the other hand existed in the mind long before there was a real communist movement."[11] And this appears to be the reason to include Paresh Chattopadhyay's chapter. While there is renewed interest in Marx in the twenty-first century as a critique of capitalism,[12] the author's Marx, however, remains one we met last century: the humanist who realised that "society cannot be liberated without the liberation of each individual" through the transformation of the mode of production and an end to the alienation of labour.[13] It is hard to find this ever being translated into state policy.

The following section ("Moments") takes us on a whistle-stop tour of seminal moments in communism's global trajectory and, most impressively, all of these chapters present their given years from a truly global perspective. Taken together, the reader gets a sense of historical boom and bust: the high hopes of "1919" in the colonial East as well as "advanced" capitalist western Europe (Jean-François Fayet); we then descend through "1936", which saw the "Great Terror" in Soviet Russia at the same time as the Comintern's "Popular Front" against fascism and (limited) defence of the Spanish Republic (Tim Rees). "1956" and the failed experiment with de-Stalinisation looks not only as the interrelationship between events in Poland and, above all, Hungary; it also highlights the significant role of China as an arbiter at the top-table of world communism and how these events accelerated the Sino-Soviet split (Serge Radchenko). And "1968" witnessed an anti-authoritarian, sexually-awakened revolt in the West as tanks rolled in to crush Czech "communism with a human face" in the East; yet Cuba's Fidel Castro personified

9 See Matthias Middell: 1989, in: Stephen Smith, Oxford Handbook, ch. 9.
10 Stephen Smith, Oxford Handbook, p. 17.
11 Ben Fowkes: Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic, London 1984, p. 1.
12 See, for example, Alain Badiou: The Communist Hypothesis, in: New Left Review 49:1 (2008), pp. 29–42.
13 Stephen Smith, Oxford Handbook, pp. 46–47.

the continuing appeal of communism in the Third World. Mao's "Cultural Revolution" and the mobilisation of youth against "capitalist roaders" is also detailed as a reaction to Soviet "bureaucratism" (all of this is covered in the chapter by Maud Anne Bracke). Finally, we arrive at the "bust" of "1989", which is presented as a consequence of longer term structural economic factors, generational change and the seminal role of Gorbachev and his mission to end the Cold War (Matthias Middell).

Importantly, Middell's appraisal of the "end of communism" also notes that some states survived the historical caesura of 1989. Above all this meant China, which is the topic of a valuable survey chapter by Yang Kuisong and Stephen Smith, which covers over a century of the country's history in the section addressing "Global Communism." Firstly, there is a largely political sketch of the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under the aegis the Comintern in 1921, the troubled relationship this provoked, and then the party's expansion—in membership and especially geographically—as a result of a renewed alliance with the nationalist Guomindang in the war against Japan. In the ensuing civil war—which had already drawn China into the nascent Cold War—achieving victory by encircling cities from the countryside was "exported" to the Third World as a revolutionary model. Then, with the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949, we see Maoism in practice. The regime's aim was to achieve socialism as rapidly as possible. However, this policy produced a famine (1958–60) killing millions; unleashed a "class struggle" in the name of egalitarianism in which social purges led to some 1.6 million executions between 1950 and 1962, and millions more were arrested and sent for "re-education" through labour. Importantly, the "Cultural Revolution" wracked society until Mao's death in 1976. It is at this point the focus of the chapter switches to the rise of China as an economic superpower, which abandoned socialism but kept the authoritarian one-party state. The story is one of qualified success. China rose from the ashes of Maoism to become a major economy, with heightened geopolitical and military influence. At home, Peking offered sufficient affluence to the rising urban, educated middle classes to stave off anything other than localised protest. All this makes a fascinating survey, and China is also covered in many of the other chapters in a manner accessible to the non-expert, making this perhaps the *Handbook's* most valuable contribution.

The section devoted to "Communist Polities and Economics" shows the interaction between politics and economics, which come together in their most extreme form in the horrors of political terror and manmade famine. Yet, as Geoffrey Robert's chapter illustrates, the Soviet Union was able to project itself as a force for peace during the Cold War. And Paul Betts introduces us to "Consumerism in Communist Societies." The treatment of "Social Relations" also extends from the "Life of a Militant" (Marco Alberto) to the reestablishment of social hierarchies (Donald Filtzer). As the Czech exile Milan Kundera told us during the Cold War, communism had no sense of humour—and also tried to rewrite citizens' memory of communist rule. But this, Donald Filtzer reminds us, did not prevent Soviet citizens cracking jokes—and remembering. One political joke, for example, has Brezhnev's mother warning her son to beware that, if the "Reds" return, he is

in serious trouble. Finally, we are presented with the world of "Communism in Culture," which ranges from religious persecution (Richard Madsen) to sport (Robert Edelman et al.). The inevitable downside is the varying quality of contributions and, at times, précis appeared to take precedence over precision; but this is something which will only irk specialists—and there are few who could cover the span of this volume.

Towards a General Theory of Communism?

At various points, Stephen Smith reminds the reader of his reluctance to reduce communism to a single essence, as presented in the *Black Book of Communism*. He also states that he would rather "leave to one side" social scientists' interest in classifying communist regimes, from "totalitarian" to "state socialism." But he does aim to provide a "historical and analytical framework" providing coherence to the diversity of essays in this volume.[14] In doing so, he opts for the definition "generic communism," which amounts to a list of features which are "common elements" in "communist regimes across the globe." In truncated form, these amount to: (1) a violent seizure of power, which dispenses with democracy and uses a leadership figure to aid the regime's (limited) legitimacy; (2) a strictly centralised one-party state, which is highly bureaucratic and hierarchical; (3) the proscription of all organisations outside of party control; (4) the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which includes the utopian ambition to create the "New Person" as well as the justification for political repression; (5) censorship of intellectual and artistic life; (6) an intrusive secret political police limiting citizens "autonomous space"; (7) a state owned and directed economy, which to varying degrees accommodates a "shadow economy."[15] Although Smith's "generic communism" is dynamic—accounting for change over time and specific local influences—he concludes that we should not speak of "communisms" in the plural. Instead, variations between regimes "are perhaps best construed as mutations of a single genus—its species, as it were—that spread across far-flung geographical spaces and temporal zones."[16] Despite the author's caveats, one is left feeling that this is so close to a variant of "totalitarianism" that some wider engagement with the specific literature would have been valuable.[17] It is, after all, at the centre of how historians across the spectrum of the historiographical debates have located their

14 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
15 Ibid., esp. pp. 3–4, 25, 29–30.
16 Ibid, p. 4.
17 For the "classic" model of totalitarianism, which produced a six-point checklist of features, see Carl J. Friedrich/Zbigniew Brzezinski: Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1965. For an overview of aspects of "totalitarianism" in communist studies, see also Norman LaPorte: Introduction: Isaac Deutscher and Biographer's Dilemma, in: Moving the Social 51 (2014), pp. 5–30.

research—not least in more recent research on Germany and Soviet Russia.[18] Equally, as the term "generic communism" is redolent of the term "generic fascism" it would have been useful to know whether—or not—the definition had any roots in the vexed debates about how to approach the regimes, movements and ideologies that have been housed under this conceptual roof.[19] My own view (which is set out elsewhere) is that interaction with a diversity of "local" conditions merits the term communisms in the plural.[20] Would anyone talk of generic capitalism, however much there are common features?

The Movement Phase of Communism in Weimar Germany

Although not absent from Smith's *Handbook*, its focus—as the author makes clear—is on communism in power. This section of the review essay aims to locate the under-researched movement phase of Germany communism within recurring debates about the dynamics of the German Communist Party (KPD): its changing relationship with the Weimar Republic and domestic society, its fixation on October 1917, and its connections with the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) and the Communist International (Comintern).[21]

18 For an excellent discussion of the relative merits of totalitarianism and autonomous spaces in the German Democratic Republic, see Paul Betts: Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic, Oxford 2010, pp. 21–50. For totalitarianism as a comparative framework, see, for example, Michael Geyer/Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds.): Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared, Cambridge 2009.

19 For a discussion of "generic fascism," see Roger Eatwell: The Nature of "Generic Fascism": The "Fascist Minimum" and the "Fascist Matrix," in: Constantin Iordachi (eds.): Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives, London 2010, pp. 134–161.

20 Norman LaPorte: Local Communisms Within a Global Movement, in: Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History 5 (2013), pp. 7–20; see also, Andreas Wirsching: Comparing Local Communisms', in: Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History 5 (2013), pp. 21–40.

21 For a discussion of more recent literature on the Communist Party, see Norman LaPorte: Isaac Deutscher and Biographer's Dilemma, in: Moving the Social 51 (2014), pp.14f; for reviews of more recent literature on the Communist Party, see Marcel Bois/Florian Wilde: Ein kleiner Boom: Entwicklung und Tendenzen der KPD-Forschung seit 1989/90, in: Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung (2010), pp. 309–322.

Biographical Approaches

More recently, biography has gained prominence in the field of communist studies, including the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). And Ralf Hoffrogge has been at the forefront of this expanding historiography.[22] His biography of Richard Müller is, however, far removed from the old fashioned "great-men-make-history" interpretation of high-political notoriety; instead, the political life of the protagonist is firmly located within the dynamics of a mass-based social movement "from below." As the author points out, the failures of the man derives from the failures of the movement. But we also learn a great deal about Richard Müller as a "forgotten revolutionary" and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (RSS) as a "forgotten movement,"[23] as well as why he was forgotten. In this respect, Ralf Hoffrogge argues that during the Cold War historians adopted clear-cut politicised narratives: Marxism-Leninism in the East and variants of Social Democracy's "democracy or dictatorship" in the West. This left no place for Richard Müller and his council-communist predilections. Broadly speaking this is true, despite his role as a significant, if transient, political leader.[24]

In 1896, at 16 years of age, Richard Müller left his family home in the Thuringia village of Weira as an orphan in order to take up an apprenticeship as a lathe operator in Berlin's giant factories. Joining the German Metal Workers' Union in 1906, by 1914 he had risen to become the head of the capital's metal-working turners' branch. Not untypically, it was Social Democracy's support for the war effort—the *Burgfrieden*—which transformed a mainstream union official into a revolutionary. Politically, Richard Müller joined the anti-war Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) in 1917. But, more importantly, he led the vast oppositional movement within the trade unions, which expressed itself in the burgeoning mass-strike movement, first in Berlin then nationally. This, Hoffrogge informs us, is an important reminder that the November Revolution found its immediate origins on the shop floor as well as in the trenches.[25]

It was in the early days of the German Revolution that Richard Müller reached the zenith of his prominence. As chair of the Berlin Executive Committee of the Workers' Councils he was in effect head of state. But man and movement began to diverge. In

22 Ralf Hoffrogge: Werner Scholem: Eine politische Biographie (1895–1940), Constance/Munich 2014.

23 Ralf Hoffrogge: Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution: Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement, Berlin 2014, p. 5.

24 For a discussion of this, see: Ralf Hoffrogge, Richard Müller, pp. 197ff. For an example how important political studies omitted any detail about Richard Müller, see the scant reference to him in David Morgan: The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party: 1917–1922, New York 1975.

25 Ralf Hoffrogge, Richard Müller, p. 8.

December 1918, the first national congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils voted to convene a National Assembly, which opted for constitutional parliamentary democracy as opposed to the council system favoured by Müller. As he had previously told the Berlin Workers' Council that the National Assembly would meet over his dead body, the Social Democratic press lasting dubbed him "Corpse Müller."[26]

Together with fellow Shop Steward and USPD leader Ernst Däumig, Richard Müller now took up the banner of a "pure council system" against the backdrop of a series of defeats in 1919/20 for the ideas, organisations and movement supporting this position. The first of these defeats was imposed by Gustav Noske, the new Defence Minister and self-styled "bloody hound of the revolution." The use of Free Corps to suppressed the strike movement for "socialisation" in spring 1919—and the overthrow of localised "council experiments"—lastingly deepened divisions on the left, which had their origins in opposition to the excessive moderation and caution of the so-called Majority Social Democratic Party's (SPD) National Assembly.[27] As Hans Mommsen lamented, the party's obsession with restoring order flowed into the Free Corps' fanatical anti-Bolshevism, which stabilised the new political order with violence and failed to uproot the institutions of the old German Empire.[28] In the short term, it forced the "revolution from below" to reroute into the more limited channels offered by the factory councils, which were given state sanction in 1920. Unlike Däumig, who was a national leader of the USPD, Richard Müller's political arena was above all the metal workers' union (DMV). Here, too, Richard Müller suffered a defeat. This time from his archrival, Robert Dissmann, who in the autumn of 1920 ensured that, even in the metal workers' union, which had been the only major union to support "anchoring" the workers' councils in the Constitution, maintained traditional forms of organisation.[29] Finally, Richard Müller—together with the left-wing of the USPD—joined the Communist Party at its "second foundation" at the end of 1920. However, like the other Revolutionary Shop Stewards activists who turned to Bolshevism, Richard Müller soon discovered that the Leninist vanguard party had no leadership role for someone with his commitment to grass-roots revolution from below. In April 1921, after the so-called "March Rising," he was ousted as head of the Communist Trade Union Centre in a factional feud which made clear that the party was the vehicle of "revolution from above" and the Comintern was the arbiter of what policies served this aim in Germany.

26 Ibid., p. 232.

27 For a discussion of the "council idea" and "works council" in the period with extensive documentation, see Ben Fowkes: The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A Selection of Documents, Leiden/Boston 2014, pp. 43–70.

28 Hans Mommsen: The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin 1989, p. 50.

29 Ralf Hoffrogge, Richard Müller, pp. 151–152.

Richard Müller's life as a political leader was short, spanning the years from 1916 until 1921. Thereafter, Hoffrogge notes that, "Having emerged out of obscurity, he [Müller] disappeared into darkness."[30] One of the few leaders of working class-origins during these events now left the main stage of Weimar politics. In the mid-1920s, he published a three volume account of the German Revolution and, in a brief trade unionist reprise at the end of the decade, was involved in the German Industrial League which was also associated with the dissident Communist Karl Korsch. What was not known until now was that Richard Müller became an entrepreneur. He set up a building company and became a private landlord, who received criticism in the communist press. He did not actively undertake opposition to the Third Reich and died peacefully in Berlin in 1943.

There are, however, two areas in which Hoffrogge's otherwise compelling account of Richard Müller as a champion of "revolution from below" could have been further qualified. Firstly, although the German Revolution was a spontaneous German "revolution from below" carried by the Councils, the influence of the Russian Revolution in the mind of Richard Müller—and other revolutionaries—was also a factor, as it was throughout much of post-war Europe.[31] For example, Müller and the RSS had planned an uprising modelled on October 1917, which was overtaken by events in early November 1918.[32] Even if the number of activists proclaiming affinity with developments in Russia was initially small, the spectre of Bolshevism stalked the streets and political meetings and haunted the minds of the Majority SPD leadership and the old military elite in equal measure. Reports from the British Foreign Office detail another "foreign" determinant in 1918/19: the proximity of the wartime Allies limiting the revolution's independent political development. These reports also indicate how the imperial military elite and the Majority SPD leadership were so obsessed with a perceived Bolshevik threat that officials in London often saw this—at least in part—as a weapon with which to force concessions over the food supply.[33]

Subsequently, the spectre of Bolshevism took on physical substance, as the USPD's left wing—including Richard Müller and many of other RSS—joined the now mass-based German Communist Party at the end of 1920 on the Comintern's specifically Leninist terms. As one commentator has already pointed out, in his own writings Richard Müller

30 Ibid., p. 223.

31 For another interesting overview of "inspiration by the Bolshevik example," see Geoff Eley: Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000, Oxford 2002, pp. 156ff.

32 Peter Loesche: Der Bolschewismus im Urteil Der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie, 1903–1920, Berlin 1967, pp. 188f.

33 Francis L. Carsten: Britain and the Weimar Republic: The British Documents, London 1984, pp. 1–33.

accept the need for the leading role of the revolutionary party.[34] Although this qualifies Hoffrogge's emphasis on continuity in Müller's political thought, he represented an important component in the early KPD. This was a skilled workers' form of radicalism which adopted a form of Leninist *realpolitik* and looked to winning majority support within the working class.[35] As a "cautious and hesitant" trade unionist disposed towards painstaking organisational work, as Hoffrogge describes him, Richard Müller had long opposed "putschism" and purely party actions in favour of "united front" mobilisations within the existing trade unions.[36] A resolute commitment to party work being rooted in the masses, as Hoffrogge shows, led to Müller being ousted from his leadership of the Communist Trade Union Centre—which coordinated trade-union policy—after the so-called "March Action" in 1921. Not only had this ill-fated uprising uprooted the KPD in its local strongholds, the factories and trade unions; crucially, ousting those criticising the Comintern's excessive influence in 1921/22 highlighted the party's early Bolshevisation. On this key theme in the historiography of the Communist Party—which recurs below—Hoffrogge reminds us that the party's German roots were more diverse that the political traditions of "Luxemburgism"; Bolshevisation also sidelined trade-union officials with a political past in the pre-war labour movement. In the view of this reviewer at least, we should also note that the radicalism of Richard Müller and the Berlin RSS was one expression of regionally and locally based radicalisms in a mosaic of tendencies joining—and usually leaving—the early Communist Party.[37] Interestingly, Müller took longer than most to leave the KPD. In new documentation found by the author in the Comintern Archive in Moscow—after the publication of the German version of this book—the author also details how Müller survived in the party until 1924, even playing a cameo role as an "ordinary soldier" in the events of 1923. It seems he was purged at this point, reminding us that the political development of the German communism and the party's policies were as much to blame for damaging its roots among radical skilled workers organised in the trade unions as the structurally driven sociological division of the workers' movement which is discussed below.

34 Ben Fowkes: Hoffrogge's Richard Müller, unpublished paper delivered at a panel discussion marking the book's publication, at Historical Materialism Conference in London, November 2014.

35 The seminal study of types of radicalism in the workers' movement remains, Erhard Lucas: Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

36 Ralf Hoffrogge, Richard Müller, p. 235.

37 For a much under cited pioneering study, see Gerhard P. Bassler: The Communist Movement in the German Revolution, 1918–1919: A Problem of Typology?, in: Central European History 6:3 (1973), pp. 233–277.

Against Stalin and Hitler

Marcel Bois' study of the Left Opposition in the KPD also deals with "forgotten figures" in the history of German communism during the Weimar Republic. But this time what is on offer is a panorama of the diversity of groups and tendencies which, from the mid-1920s, to one extent or another opposed the policies pursued by Stalin in Soviet Russia. As the author points out, the fact that these communist groupings have all but vanished from our memory is all the more surprising as the Left constituted the dominant tendency in the membership.[38] Unlike those activists who, like Richard Müller, promoted the "united front" policy, these activists held (ultra-) radical, uncompromising, sectarian and (in the early years of the Republic) putschist views, which led the party into the blind alley of social and political isolation.[39] Yet there were domestic German reasons for this, as Marcel Bois notes: political polarisation during under the Weimar Republic was endemic, a product of war, revolution and recurrent crises. And this drove the radical Left's belief that capitalism was not "the end of history."[40]

What defined these groupings was their belief that Stalin had betrayed Lenin's revolution and, during the second-half of the 1920s, they represented a "failed alternative" to the actual history of the KPD.[41] One contribution made by this important study is adding to a surprisingly sparse literature, not least the history of significant internal-party groups such as the "Wedding Opposition."[42] When taken together with recent major biographies of Ruth Fischer and Werner Scholem, we now know much more about this dimension of the party's history.[43] In order to provide this, Marcel Bois' research is a *tour de force* of

38 Marcel Bois: Kommunisten gegen Hitler und Stalin: Die Linke Opposition der KPD in der Weimarer Republik, Berlin 2014, pp. 16ff.

39 Ibid., p. 105.

40 Ibid., p. 526.

41 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

42 Otto Langels: Die Ultralinke Opposition der KPD in der Weimarer Republik: Zur Geschichte und Theorie der KPD-Opposition (Linke KPD), der Entschiedenen Linken, der Gruppe "Kommunistische Politik" und des Deutschen Industrie-Verbandes in den Jahren 1924 bis 1928, Frankfurt am Main 1984; Rüdiger Zimmermann: Der Leninbund: Linke Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik, Düsseldorf 1978; Siegfried Bahne: Zwischen "Luxemburgismus" und "Stalinismus." Die "ultralinke" Opposition in der KPD, in: Vierteljahreshefte für Geschichte 9 (1961), pp. 359–381. For recent biographies of leading Left Communists, see Mario Kessler: Arthur Rosenberg: Ein Historiker im Zeitalter der Katastrophen (1889–1943), Cologne 2003; Mario Kessler: Ruth Fischer: Ein Leben mit und gegen Kommunisten (1895–1961), Cologne 2013; Ralf Hoffrogge: Werner Scholem.

43 For an ungenerous review of these three studies which also makes this point, see Wladislaw Hedeler: Neue Untersuchungen über Linke Kommunisten in der KPD, in: Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung (2015), pp. 279–290.

archival heavy lifting, spanning the party's central records in Berlin and the groups' own publications, police reports, regional, local and factory based archives, the Trotsky Papers in Harvard University as well as the Comintern's Electronic Archive.

Bois' study begins by outlining the factional struggles in the Soviet leadership which intensified after Lenin's death, and acted as the Left Opposition's point of political orientation in what amounted to a parallel party history.[44] When the former Left Opposition took the party leadership in 1924, they adopted the Comintern's Bolshevisation campaign with élan. Although the chairman of the Comintern at this time was Zinoviev, Bolshevisation meant the creation of the "Stalinist" structures subsequently used to silence and, whenever required, "purge" internal party opposition. The Left leadership was later hung by its own petard. Yet subordination to Moscow was not what these younger, more independent and largely intellectual leaders had intended to do. Instead, their aim was to use these mechanisms to remake the party in their own, ultra-radical image. To these ends, the German Left declare that, "the party must be unified, its ideology unified, its structure unified," and acted upon this by purging its factional opponents on the party's "Right" as part of the Stalin-sanctioned campaign against "Trotskyism" as a "deviation from Leninism."[45] When the factional alignment in the Russian Communist Party changed, and the German Left ultimately refused to comply with the Comintern's "moderation" of policy, the structures and party culture of "iron" hierarchical discipline were in place to oust them and install the new so-called "Comintern-loyal Left" under the radical former worker, Ernst Thälmann. Even Ruth Fischer, out of respect for "party discipline," signed the Comintern's "Open Letter," which announced to an incredulous party membership that the leadership it had only just re-elected had been swept aside.[46]

If taking power in 1924, in the immediate aftermath of the failed "German October" had united the Left, then the "Open Letter" blew it apart. Indeed Bois details the formation 15 groupings and tendencies which feuded with each other over largely ideological issues.[47] Some were more prepared to distance themselves from Moscow that others. And the Comintern taught the new party leadership how to hammer on divisions between and within these groupings. Some prominent leaders, notably Karl Korsch and Werner Scholem, openly stated that "Stalinism" had led to a revival of capitalism; while the wider Left were rallied by slogans such as "Back to Lenin" and calls for a return to internal-party democracy which, they believed, could save the inheritance of October 1917.

44 Ibid., pp. 39–73.
45 Ibid., pp. 153–55.
46 Ibid., pp. 166–68.
47 An index of these groupings and tendencies is provided, see ibid., p. 611.

Despite the fractures and cracks running through these groups, there were two significant attempts to reunify the German Left. The first of these was a campaign inside the KPD which collected the signatures of hundreds of party officials backing a "Declaration on the Russian Question"—or the "Letter of the 700" as it became known.[48] The campaign represented a rapprochement between the Left Opposition around Ruth Fischer and Hugo Urbahns and the Wedding Opposition—an under-researched nationwide umbrella grouping with strong support among local officials and activists—as well as a penumbra of others, notably Korsch's "Intransigent Left." With support for the "Letter" spanning members of the Central Committee (Hugo Urbahns) to party workers, the strength of opposition in the party was made clear. Its failure owed to developments in Moscow: the "capitulation" of Zinoviev, the erstwhile patron of the German Left, to Stalin in power struggle to succeed Lenin. Leon Trotsky, who did not capitulate to Stalin, also repudiated international factional alignments. Thus, abandoned by their allies in Moscow, the "Letter's" ultimate impact on the KPD was to produce a mood in favour of "party unity" and an end to "factionalism".

The second attempt to unite the German Left against "Stalinism" was the formation of the *Leninbund* in early 1928, which followed the expulsion from the KPD of most of its leading figures.[49] Initially, it looked like an umbrella organisation with potential. However, cracks soon appeared here too. There were disagreements about standing independent candidates in elections and, when the Comintern announced a renewed 'ultra-left' policy, Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow (unsuccessfully) applied to be re-admittance to the KPD. Only Hugo Urbahns stood firm in the *Leninbund*. The local group in Suhl, which had been the group's stronghold, defected to the SPD *en masse*. A further grouping around Anton Grylewicz became the centre of gravity for German supporters of Trotsky.

A following chapter is devoted to how these groups, influenced by Trotsky's theory of fascism, abandoned their earlier sectarianism and took seriously the very real threat posed by the rise of National Socialism after 1930. While the KPD held to the Comintern's theory of "social fascism," which justified treating Social Democracy as the "main enemy," these Trotskyist grouping initiated local "united front" mobilisations, for example in Bruchsal and Oranienburg.[50]

Marcel Bois then compliments these political and organisational insights by detailing the sociology of the Left Opposition and what its members did, including a form of "revolutionary parliamentarism" in the Reichstag and a more practice approach to municipal government.[51] Most significantly, prosopographical insights—derived from a database containing some 1,260 biographies—are used to change our understanding

48 Ibid., pp. 212–27, 527.
49 Ibid., pp. 253ff, 527f.
50 Ibid, pp. 18, 21–22, 24, 36, 529–31.
51 Ibid, pp. 36, 525–26.

of who these activists were. Previously, we thought that they comprised intellectuals, the unemployed and those new to the labour movement. Instead, we discover that the social profile of Left Communism was little different from the wider party: two-thirds of them were workers; over 50 per cent had been in the Communist Party from 1919/20; most were under 40 years of age; and very few women were involved. And, although there was a degree of nationwide support, their strongholds were in Berlin, the Ruhr and Pfalz.

The book's conceptual framework—and *leitmotiv*—is an extensive, empirically-informed engagement with Hermann Weber's "Stalinisation thesis," according to which the KPD jettisoned its revolutionary ambitions in Germany and implemented Moscow's policy directives, which in the first instance served the regime's non-revolutionary foreign policy.[52] For these reasons, Marcel Bois' stresses the indispensability of Weber's political and organisational approach precisely because the documentary basis leaves no doubt that the plans to eliminate the anti-Stalinist opposition in Germany were hatched by the leadership of the Russian Communist Party, passed on to the Comintern and implemented in Germany by Stalin's placemen, most prominently Ernst Thälmann.[53] As we will see below, the same development occurred in the American Communist Party. Yet, as Marcel Bois concedes, the Left had built Stalin's scaffold from which they were swung; and these grouping would have purged the party of its remaining "moderates"—such as Ernst Meyer and Clara Zetkin—who supported the "united front" tactic and working within the wider labour movement. Their leadership might even have isolated the party before the Comintern's "left turn" in 1928.[54]

To achieve all of this, a lengthy study was required: the book pushes 600 pages. But the space is used well in order to provide an extensive contextualisation of the origins and development of the German Left. Discussions of "alternatives" to Stalin have been prominent in the literature over the past half century and Bois' focus is on Trotsky as the heir to Leninism "betrayed"; others looked to Bukharin.[55] But what was it an alternative to in second half of the 1920? My own earlier research called Ruth Fischer's "Bolshevisation" campaign "Stalinisation with a different name."[56] And what would the alternative have been at the end of the 1920s? After all, the Comintern's "new line" was a return to the

52 For an English translation of Hermann Weber's "Stalinisation thesis", see Hermann Weber: The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views, in: Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan/Matthew Worley (eds.): Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53, Basingstoke 2008, pp. 22–44. For Marcel Bois discussion of these issues, see Marcel Bois, Kommunisten, pp. 28–33.

53 Marcel Bois, Kommunisten, pp. 34, 528.

54 Ibid., p. 529f.

55 Perhaps the most notable of these studies is, Stephen Cohen: Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938, Oxford 1980.

56 Norman LaPorte: The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924–1933: Factionalism, Fratricide and Political Failure, Oxford 2003, pp. 79–131.

Left's "old line". The answer, as suggested previously by Uta Stolle, is that it would have been a German vanguard party which did not dance to Moscow tune and did respond to developments in Germany.[57] Their point of reference was Lenin's October 1917 and global revolution, not Stalin's "socialism in one country." The German Left may have been a failed alternative, but those principled individual who risked their lives—not least in genuine antifascist ventures after Hitler came to power—should not be forgotten.

Deutschland, Russland, Komintern— Interpreting the "Archival Revolution"

The documentary collection Deutschland, Russland, Komintern, is the culmination of an important collaboration between leading German and Russian historians: Hermann Weber, Bernhard H. Bayerlein, Jakov Drabkin and Aleksandr Galkin. The publication also benefited from the adept assistance of Gleb J. Albert, a member of the new generation of communism experts with polyglot as well as historical skills, who aided the process of editing the material for publication.[58] All three volumes are freely available on the internet, offering easy-to-access for researchers.[59] The main theme running throughout the documents is the modes of action allowing the Russian Politburo to set Comintern policy, and how this impacted on the KPD and on German-Soviet foreign relations. In addition, the editors have written scene-setting introductory chapters.

While the publication of these documents constitute a vast contribution to communist studies alone, the editors' foreword notes that interpretation—based on the type of academic freedom absent under Stalinism—always remains the heart and soul of the historian's task. So how have these documents—and the wider "archival revolution"—reshaped our understanding of the relationship between the KPD and Moscow? One observation from reading these documents is to note just how accurate Hermann Weber's pioneering early research was. Long before the Soviet Union collapsed and the archive doors were opened, Weber's work relied upon what were essentially stray documents in West German archives, a vast number of interviews with former leading German Communists and opens sources, such as official communist publications and

57 Uta Stolle: Arbeiterpolitik im Betrieb, Cologne 1980, pp. 268ff.

58 See, for example, Gleb J. Albert: "Esteemed Comintern!": The Communist International and World-Revolutionary Charisma in Early Soviet Society, in: Twentieth Century Communism 8:1 (2015), pp. 10–39.

59 See http://degruyter.com/viewbooktoc/product/212875 (accessed on 1 July 2016).

those of dissident communist groups. Nevertheless, as his introductory essay in this volume details, the archival revolution has modified his "Stalinisation thesis" to account for a very early process of Bolshevisation which, in turn, flowed into Stalinisation.[60]

In summary, Hermann Weber uses the new documentation to show that, as the Soviet regime began to consolidate its hold on power in the course of 1920, the Comintern was able to play the dominant role in relations with the KPD. An example of this is how, at the beginning of 1921, Radek, Bukharin and the Comintern's emissaries in Germany—notably Guralski and Bela Kun—overthrew the KPD leadership around Paul Levi for questioning Moscow's authority. Then, together with the so-called "pro-Soviet left" group around Heinrich Brandler, they drove a policy of forcing a German uprising in support of the Soviet state which had been shaken by the Kronstadt rising.[61] As clear evidence of these objectives, Hermann Weber cites a letter from Kun to Lenin in May 1921.[62] This was a turning point in the KPD's history, a development which was also impressively detailed in Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten's classic study, which was published when the archives remained closed.[63] From now on, the Comintern could intervene—whatever the impact on the German communist movement—to appoint and remove party leaders, as suited Moscow's needs.

The early intersection of reasons of state, foreign policy and the pursuit of the German revolution are, as Hermann Weber's essay elucidates, personified by Karl Radek, the Comintern's "Germany expert." A year after pushing for revolution, he played a key role in the diplomacy preceding the Rapallo Treaty (1922). Indeed, Radek was received by no one less than German Chancellor.[64] Before these new insights from the Soviet archives, Weber had emphasised that the key changes in the relationship between the KPD and Moscow took shape after Lenin's death in January 1924, which was compounded by the party's

60 In this regard, Hermann Weber credits the work of Wladislaw Hedeler/Alexander Vatlin (eds.): Die Weltpartei aus Moskau: Der Gründungskongress der Kommunistischen Internationale 1919: Protokoll und neue Dokumente, Berlin 2008.

61 See, for example, Jean-Francois Fayet: Karl Radek (1885–1939): Biographie Politique, Bern 2004; Wolf-Dietrich Gutjahr: "Revolution muss sein:" Karl Radek – Die Biographie, Cologne 2012.

62 Hermann Weber: Zum Verhältnis von Komintern, Sowjetstaat und KPD, in: Hermann Weber/Jakov Drabkin/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Deutschland, Russland, Komintern, vol. 1, Berlin 2014, esp. pp. 40–44; Hermann Weber/Jakov Drabkin/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Deutschland, Russland, Komintern, vol. 2, Document 43.

63 Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten: Aufstand der Avantgarde: Die Marzaktion der KPD 1921, Frankfurt/New York 1986.

64 Hermann Weber: Zum Verhältnis von Komintern, Sowjetstaat und KPD, pp. 4, 68 and documents 58 and 117.

"failed October" in 1923.[65] Yet, as Bernhard H. Bayerlein reminds us in his introductory essay, Stalin and Stalinism were a 'retreat from the original Bolshevik project' of world revolution and, as such, 1924 remains a crucial turning point.[66]

Bayerlein and Weber's long-standing collaboration in order to bring the documentation to a wider readership, notably in the 'Archive des Kommunismus' series, offers extensive additional coverage of some the developments touched on here. For example, documentation underscoring the determining influence of the Soviet Politburo in the so-called "German October" (1923) and the 'Thälmann-Skandal' in which Stalin and Molotov intervened personally to reinstate Stalin loyalist and party chairman, Ernst Thälmann in 1928.[67] In all of these developments, Hermann Weber's early research had been able to illuminate even the shadowy corners of the informal, conspiratorial networks used by the Russian Communist Party leadership and Comintern to Stalinise the Communist Party.[68] What has changed in this respect is the quality of the primary sources as a foundation for much greater precision in the reconstruction and analysis of events.

This, of course, is crucial to the historical study of German communism. To take one important example, the new documentation—as Weber and Bayerlein detail—now leaves no doubt about the decisive role of Moscow in forcing the KPD's participation in a referendum to dissolve the SPD-led Prussia Landtag, even although this meant standing on the same side as the Stahlhelm and Nazi Party.[69] These events were already outlined by Weber in his major study of the KPD's fateful role in the politics of the early 1930s.[70] We knew, for example, about the last minute decision at the end of July 1931 to risk adopting this policy; and we could be *almost* certain that the decision was taken in Moscow and *probably* grew out of a power struggle in the party leadership over how best to implement the Comintern's "general line." But key details remained a matter of conjecture. We now know that almost the entire KPD leadership—spanning the Sekretariat, Politburo and Central Committee—opposed participating in there referendum campaign scheduled for early August. However, Heinz Neumann wrote to Wilhelm Pieck, the party's representative

65 See also, Hermann Weber: The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views.

66 Bernhard Bayerlein: Deutscher Kommunismus und globaler Stalinismus – Komintern, KPD und die Sowjetunion (1929–1943), in: Hermann Weber/Jakov Drabkin/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Deutschland, Russland, Komintern, p. 235.

67 Hermann Weber/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Deutscher Oktober 1923: Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern, Berlin 2003; Hermann Weber/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Der Thälmann-Skandal: Geheime Korrespondenz mit Stalin, Berlin 2003.

68 Herman Weber: Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus: Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik, Frankfurt am Main 1969, pp. 120ff.

69 Hermann Weber: Verhältnis Komintern, Sowjetstaat und KPD, pp. 86f; Bernhard Bayerlein: Deutscher Kommunismus, pp. 252f.

70 Hermann Weber: Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie: Strategie und Taktik der KPD 1929–1933, Dusseldorf 1982.

with the ECCI in Moscow, pointing out that participation could be "expedient" on the basis that, to succeed, the referendum needed greater numbers than the Stahlhelm and Nazis could mobilise. Fresh elections, according to Neumann, were likely to produce a communist electoral victory in the SPD's last bastion. After sounding out members of the Comintern and Russian Politburo, Pieck replied on 20 July, stating that: "among leading comrades, not only of the Comintern but also of the [Bolshevik] party, there is the unanimous view that the party [KPD] should participate in the referendum at all costs."[71] The entire KPD leadership then conducted a u-turn, following Moscow's—ultimately Stalin's—directive. Ernst Thälmann and Joseph Winternitz, the head of the Agitprop Division, were the only two leaders who refused to participate because of the likely impact this would have on attempts to win over Social Democratic workers in the so-called "united front from below."[72] There is, however, something missing: a direct reference to Stalin let alone his signature. Here we are still left to guess what was inside Stalin's mind; and the insights of Thomas Weingartner in 1970, as Bayerlein flags up, remains our best guide. According to Weingartner's close reading of the Soviet press, Stalin wanted to prevent Germany's "western orientation"—as championed by the SPD—which at this point involved a feared rapprochement with France.[73]

Pointing to the wider collection of archival materials published in this volume, as well as the deposits in Moscow that he has been a prime mover in unearthing, Bayerlein stresses that Moscow consistently underestimated the existential danger posed by a Nazi "seizure of power" and the cataclysm this would provoke in the global system. Indeed, reading between the lines, he states that Stalin would have prefer to work with the Nazis than a Social Democratic government, even if he assured Ernst Thälmann in November 1932 that any prospect of Hitler taking power was "unthinkable."[74]

71 Hermann Weber/Jakov Drabkin/Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.): Deutschland, Russland, Komintern, vol. 2, Document 266.

72 For relations between the Russian Communist Party Politburo, the Comintern and the KPD, see also Bert Hoppe: In Stalins Gefolgschaft. Moskau und die KPD 1928–1933, Munich 2007; for a summary of his work in English, see: Bert Hoppe: Iron Revolutionaries and salon Socialists: Bolsheviks and German Communists in the 1920s and 1930s, in: Kritika 10 (2009), pp. 499–526.

73 Thomas Weingartner: Stalin und der Aufsteig Hitlers: Die Deutschlandpolitik der Sowjetunion und der Kommunistischen Internationale, Berlin 1970.

74 Bernhard Bayerlein: Deutscher Kommunismus, p. 256; a number of studies believed that Stalin anticipated a military dictatorship, see, for example, Heinrich August Winkler: Der Weg in die Katastrophe: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1930–1933, Berlin/Bonn 1987, pp. 734ff; Horst Duehnke: Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945, Cologne 1972, pp. 60–61.

Even when Hitler did take power—provoking astonishment in Moscow—the leadership of the Russian Communist Party, as Bayerlein details, completely failed to appreciate that this marked a "historic watershed."[75] The Comintern and leading German Communists, notably Fritz Heckert, insisted that the "Hitler-regime" could not last and the use of violence against Nazism's political enemies would finally dispel any "democratic illusions" among the "working people." As these events unfolded in Germany, the KPD lost all contact with the Comintern leadership. The ECCI's first pronouncement did not come until early April.

The documents are also used to debunk a cornerstone in the German Democratic Republic's claim to continuity in "antifascism." The protocol of Ernst Thälmann's last speech to the party leadership, held in secret on the fringes of Berlin, was certainly embellished by the regime's leadership, if not actually falsified. In this regard, the international role of "antifascist campaigns"—led by propaganda *Meister*, Willi Münzenberg—were, from the Soviet Politburo's perspective at least, no more that exercises in "soft power" without real political commitment. While account is given to the "contradictory" nature of the statements issued by Moscow, Bayerlein draws on the documentation to stress it is at least probable that, from 1933, Stalin's actual aim was a pact with Hitler, as achieved in 1939.[76] This area of interpretation is the only aspect of an otherwise compelling documentary-based analysis that seems questionable. After all, the Western "democracies" as well as the Third Reich saw "Popular Front" governments come to power in France and Spain, influencing their policies and the international balance of power, not least in the Spanish civil war.[77]

A Transnational Methodology—from Germany to the USA

Bayerlein's chapter is also a call for a transnational approach to Stalinism by deploying Hermann Weber's Stalinisation model as a conceptual framework for the comparative study of global communism.[78] According to this framework, the organisations projecting Soviet power are the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party, the Comintern and its "national sections"; and the agents of Stalinist bureaucratisation in this transnational

75 Bernhard Bayerlein: Deutscher Kommunismus, pp. 262ff.

76 Bernhard Bayerlein: Deutscher Kommunismus, pp. 270, 244ff.

77 For a useful summary of these issues of international relations form the Soviet perspective, see Chris Ward: Stalin's Russia, London 1992, pp. 176, 177–180.

78 The Stalinisation model was adopted as the methodology informing the contributions to, Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley's *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53*, which covers Europe and North America.

process operated through both formal and informal networks with a worldwide reach. As examples, Bayerlein points to the transnational nature of the "Great Terror", which was pumped through—and decimated—the Comintern and its "national sections", and the use of "socialism in one country" as a model to be exported to the developing world in order to create a Soviet presence here too. In this way, Stalinism—ultimately Stalin's "personal dictatorship"—is viewed as a transnational phenomenon, which—unlike "totalitarian theory"—accounts for social interaction and change over time as well as top-down political domination.

Although there are few directly comparative approaches offering a global transnational approach to Stalinism and Stalinisation as proposed by Bayerlein, there are studies—including those based on archival research using the Comintern's files—which allow historians to make indirect comparisons.[79] One such study is Jacob Zumoff's *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* which, when addressing the processes of "Stalinisation", has striking parallels with the KPD. Indeed, Jacob Zumoff explicitly engages with Hermann Weber's model when defining the Stalinisation of the American Communist Party (CPUSA).[80] The historiography which Jacob Zumoff's study is situated within also reflect the same debates that run through the study of the KPD, turning on the balance between exogenous (Moscow) and endogenous (German/America) factors. And these debates also follow the same generational changes, from the writing of former Communists with insider knowledge (Hermann Weber and Theodor Draper) to the rise of social history from the 1960s; and from the rise of "neo-orthodox" studies after the "archival revolution" of the 1990s to the influence of the "cultural turn" in the twenty-first century.[81] In these issues of methodology, Jacob Zumoff positions himself firmly in the political-history camp, rejecting those who try to write communist history as the party's absorption in a wider social and cultural milieu. Unlike in Germany, communism was a fringe phenomenon. In capitalism's largest and most important country there were only some 12–14,000 members in the mid-1920s, which placed it on the periphery of both domestic politics and the Comintern's political planning.

Despite the one-size-fits-all approach to policy adopted by the ECCI, there were, of course, local and national peculiarities which meant that the implementation the Comintern's "lines" had different impacts in different locations. Most significantly, there was the crucial issue of racial oppression in the USA, which was acute and immediate there—if not absent in the western European empires. In this respect, and in the party's

79 For a discussion of the problems of indirect comparisons using the example of the German "*Sonderweg*", see Jürgen Kocka: Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German "Sonderweg", in: History and Theory 38:1 (1999), pp. 40–50.

80 Jacob A. Zumoff: The Communist International and US Communism: 1919–1929, Leiden/Boston 2014, pp. 12ff.

81 For a discussion of the historiography of the American Communist Party, see ibid., pp. 3–7.

early work within the American labour movement, the author emphases the Comintern's overwhelmingly "positive" role in "Americanising" the party as part of a "good Lenin, bad Stalin" narrative.

However, the affinities with the experience of the KPD and its relationship with the Comintern and Russian Communist Party are almost a carbon copy. The Workers (Communist) Party—it only took the name Communist Party of the USA in 1929—was founded in 1919/20 out of a split in the Socialist Party. The party's policy is then driven by a Comintern emissary, Joseph Pogany, who implemented the ill-fated overtures towards the American Farm-Labour Party. After the Fifth Congress of the Comintern (1924), the party implemented Zinoviev's "Bolshevisation" campaign and, from the mid-1920s there was intense, inward-looking factionalism in which alliances were made with Bolshevik patrons. After Ruthenberg died (1927), he is replaced by Jay Lovestone, a Bukharin supporter, who in turn is ousted in favour of the Stalin loyalist, Earl Browder. During this period—as detailed by Marcel Bois for the KPD—a Trotskyist "Left Opposition" formed under James P Cannon, who was purged in 1928; this grouping—like the *Leninbund*—lost support during the Comintern's so-called "Third Period" because of the attraction of Moscow's revolutionary rhetoric, if not action.

While many authors who have made a significant contribution to communist studies hold (one of a variety of) Marxist profiles, or have had in the past, there is one crucial area in which Zumoff's work falls short of historical distance.[82] The author presents the policies of the Comintern's so-called "Third Period" as a time when American "Communists were at their most heroic," forming independent trade unions, fighting "Jim Crow" (that is racism) and organising the unemployed. Zumoff then asserts that the "social democratic aspects of Stalinism became clear in the popular-front period of the 1930s."[83] What is meant here is ending the fight against "social democracy" in cross-class alliances represented a break with the Leninist struggle against "reformism" and the "bourgeois." But surely, as the author also alludes to, this a policy imposed by Moscow—just like the "Third Period." This, and other uncritical usages of Leninist concepts and language, will jar with many readers.

82 Jacob Zumoff makes clear his sympathies for and commitment to Leninism, see especially pp. 20f.

83 Ibid., pp. 365–66.

Communists Against the Bourgeois State

The histories of the German and American Communist Party discussed above are primarily party histories, which address the nature of the dynamics between Berlin and Moscow and how this impacted on German—and American—communism. They do not omit the wider domestic context in which German communism functioned, such as the early mass movement in the case of Ralf Hoffrogge's study or the party's sociology and everyday political activities as detailed by Marcel Bois; but it is covered as background, increasingly subordinate to the causal relationship with the Russian Communist Party and the Comintern. There are, however, influential social histories which set out to explain why Communists could internalise the ultra-leftism of the Comintern's "Third Period." The first of these was the view that industrial "rationalisation"—or modernising the economy to increase productivity—which was endorsed by the SPD—gave a sociological basis to the political split in the workers' movement. The SPD represented relatively affluent and skilled workers, who were disposed to the long-term political orientation of "reformism;" the Communist Party, by contrast, represented the unskilled, unemployed and under-employed workers who tended to favour spontaneous actions in their immediate material interest or were pushed from the factories onto the streets.[84] To use Klaus-Michael Mallmann's conceptualisation, by around 1930 the KPD had been uprooted from the milieu that had spanned the parties in the trade unions, sporting and leisure organisations until the end of the 1920s.[85] As the Great Depression hit Germany at the end of the 1920s, Eve Rosenhaft's pioneering social-history approach concluded that, to the KPD's rank-and-file membership, there appeared to be a war on two fronts, as the Comintern asserted. On the one hand, the party fought the Nazis on the streets; while, on the other hand, they were subjected to SPD administrations which—above all in Prussia—pursued policies of severe austerity and heavy-handed, anti-Communist

84 For a discussion of this strand in the historiography in English, see Norman LaPorte: Local Communisms.

85 Klaus-Michael Mallmann sets out his views in summary in: Klaus Michael Mallmann: Milieu, Radikalismus und lokale Gesellschaft: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Kommunismus in der Weimarer Republik, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 21:1 (1995), pp. 5–31.

policing.[86] For these reasons, the SPD's Minister of the Interior in Prussia, Carl Severing, and the head of the Berlin police force, Albert Grzesinski, became hate figures among Communists.[87]

Even if we see this as a "secondary" factor, giving the "Third Period" in Germany more meaning that in, for example, Britain or the United States, the size of German mass movement ensured that this had a significant impact on an already polarised political culture. The corrosive effect of the Stalinised Communist Party—and the National Socialist German Workers' Party—on political culture during the Weimar Republic is one of the main contributions made by Hennig Grunwald's *Courtroom to Revolutionary Stage*. While this study contributes to our wider understanding of communism during the Weimar Republic, it is primarily located in the historiography of the legal system, rather than communist studies *per se*. In this respect, the author widens the traditional focus on judges to the rise of party lawyers and barristers who fronted the Communists' and Nazis' fight against the "Weimar system" in the courtroom, which was communicated to the public via the media in a manner poisoning the body politic. Grunwald does not contradict the "orthodox view" that the Republic's judges were hardly impartial; they were, he concedes, drawn from the Wilhelmine social elite and remained more loyal to the old order that the new.[88] But they alone, he argues, could not have had such a terminally destructive impact on Weimar's political culture; this required the rise of the party political layers of the political extremes.[89]

Reviewers more familiar with the history of Nazis than I am have stressed the originality and significance of Grunwald's treatment of the rise of the National Socialist Legal Organisation, which was strongly influenced by the Communists' courtroom performance.[90] His treatment of the KPD's legal organisation, "Red Aid" (*Rote Hilfe*) is also an original and helpful contribution to our understanding of the wider role of German communism.[91]

86 Eve Rosenhaft: Beating the Fascists?: The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929–1933, Cambridge 1983, esp. p. 211; Eric Weitz paid generous tribute to Rosenhaft's pioneering approach, see Eve Rosenhaft: Beating the Fascists: An Appreciation, in: Twentieth Century Communism 2 (2010), pp. 169–179.

87 The most influential study of the Berlin police and its anti-communism is, Laing Hsi-huey: Die Berliner Polizei in der Weimarer Republik, Berlin 1977.

88 Henning Grunwald: Courtroom, pp. 12f, 214, 216.

89 Ibid., p. 4.

90 See Benjamin Hett's review in: English Historical Review 538 (2014), p. 230.

91 Other studies have overlooked the courtroom dimension of the "Red Aids" role in Germany, which also covered, for example, "humanitarian" relief work. Indeed, the umbrella organisation was founded by Willi Münzenberg at Lenin's suggestion to promote famine relief for Soviet Russia in 1921. Among the most prominent German supporters of *Rote Hilfe* was Albert Einstein, see Henning Grunwald: Courtroom, pp. 132, 216; Heinrich August Winkler:

As a peg on which to hang his main argument, the book opens with an anecdote. In July 1925, Joseph Gärtner, a provincial party official and playwright, stood before the State Court for Protection of the Republic in Leipzig. The charge was "high treason" and the crime was the artistic direction of a celebration marking the anniversary of the October Revolution in a Stuttgart beer cellar; the sentence was 15 month imprisonments. Yet this outcome was celebrated, not lamented by the KPD. Gärtner's party lawyer, Ferdinand Timpe, wrote to the leading communist Wilhelm Pieck, who also headed "Red Aid", stating that: "The press box was packed, just like the courtroom itself, thanks to advanced reporting in the papers [...] The *Staatsgerichthof* swallowed our bait hook, line and sinker."[92] The role of the lawyer, Henning Grunwald observes, had changed from the advocate of the defendant's interests to those of the party; the defendant's role was as willing martyr in an intransigent, uncompromising struggle against the Republic. The courtroom had become a revolutionary stage from which to project this ideological message.

These developments are located in shifts within German legal culture which were already taking place from the later Wilhelmine period. The "military trial" in 1914 of Rosa Luxemburg and her lawyer (and lover), Paul Levi, serves as an apt illustration. We are then taken through a number of prominent trails of Communist during the 1920s and the role of the KPD's growing staff of lawyers employed through the aegis of the party's "Central Legal Offices." The examples used cover, for example, Max Hölz in 1921 for his involvement in the so-called "March Action" and subsequent campaigns for his release, as well and the trials of party leaders, Arkadi Maslow and Hugo Urbahns in the mid 1920s.

At times the details of individual Communists and communist history were inaccurate. For example, Maslow was not the leader of the Hamburg Communists in 1923; and the statements subsequently made against him by Ruth Fischer need to be qualified by the fact that she was his life-long partner. Similarly, the KPD leadership's attack on Maslow and Hugo Urbahns—who did head the Communist Party in the district of Wasserkante—related to the factional struggle in the party and, in Hugo Urbahns case, a reluctance to become a martyr.[93] Had the author read, for example, Hermann Weber's encyclopaedic *Wandlung der deutschen Kommunismus* this party-political context would have been clear, as would Max Hölz's membership of the split-off Communist Workers' Party of Germany—even if the trial was instrumentalised by the KPD for its own purposes.

These small gripes aside, Grunwald's contribution to an under-researched aspect of the history of the KPD is as important as it is interesting. We can now add courtroom militancy to the movement's ideologically-motivated violence on the streets and the

Der Schein der Normalität: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1924–1930, Berlin/Bonn 1987, pp. 275–76.

92 Henning Grunwald: Courtroom, pp. 1–3.

93 Ibid., pp. 119, 128.

role its paramilitary organisation, the League of Red Front-Fighters; parliament, where performance and disruption were also deployed, as Marcel Bois' study details; in election campaigns and other mobilisations, such as the referendum in Prussia in 1931; as well as in the factories. Especially during the so-called period of "relative stabilisation," Grunwald notes that these trials helped maintain a sense of revolutionary purpose.[94] Drawing on earlier comparative research into the political extremes by Andreas Wirsching and the revival of variants of "totalitarian theory" and "political religion," the author has also made a cultural history contribution to how the KPD forged an emotionally underpinned a sense of community and political mission among its members.[95]

"Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue": Concluding Comments

For students studying communism today, the topic has become history proper. The "alternative" to global capitalism has vanished, leaving only the China in its stead, which few if any would recognise as carrying the communist gene. Yet there is still a "spectre of communism" from the October Revolution of 1917, at least on the pages of specialist literature—the writings of Leon Trotsky's. As Stephen Kotkin has pointed out, Trotsky's ideas, if not his politics, have influenced seminal "revisionist" studies—notably those by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Moshe Lewin.[96] Trotsky's conceptualisation of Stalinist "degeneration" and account of how the bureaucracy was used as a political power base in order to end the Bolsheviks' early revolutionary ambitions is also peppered throughout many of the studies reviewed here—most explicitly in Marcel Bois' detailed appraisal of the KPD's Left Opposition.

This is something "old" in communist studies. Something "borrowed" is taken from Hermann Weber's compelling "Stalinisation model" which continues to engage a new generation of researchers, in Germany and beyond. Much of the "new" is an empirical engagement with Weber's thesis, which has been refined by Ralf Hoffrogge and Marcel Bois and further developed by Bernhard Bayerlein in his appeal for a transnational, comparative methodology. Ralf Hoffrogge's biography of Richard Müller illustrates how the KPD's inheritance was much wider that "Luxemburgism". He shows how the Revolutionary Shop Stewards were early champions of winning over a majority of the working class for "revolution from below," as well as being advocates of internal-party democracy. Yet, as Marcel Bois' study of the Left Opposition makes clear, there was a strong

94 Ibid., p. 216.
95 Ibid., pp. 171ff, 216.
96 Stephen Kotkin: Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation, Berkley 1995, pp. 14f.

dynamic from within the revolutionary left in Germany which, in the absence of a mass movement by the early 1920, became attracted to the Bolshevik model of the disciplined, ultra-centralised vanguard party and revolution from above. The periodisation of when the Comintern's "national parties" were Stalinised, and the related issue of continuity with Leninism, many be debated; but nobody questions Stalinism as the defining ideology and practice of communism from the later 1920s onwards. If researchers adopt Bernhard Bayerlein's call for a transnational approach to communist studies with the Stalinisation model as a comparative conceptual framework, we could even see an increase in scholarly interest in this way of exploring communist history.

The "new" has grown out of the "old" in a fruitful dialectic, to borrow from Marx. Beyond this, however, there is another "new:" the importance of culturalist approaches, as provided here by Hennig Grunwald. This type of study aids our understanding of what it meant to be a Communist as well as how communism challenged the societies it grew out of, whether this was Tsarist Russia, Weimar Germany or pre-revolutionary China. At least in the study of the KPD, the field still awaits a historian to synthesise what we now know from publications prioritising political and organisation approaches with insights drawn from culturalist methodologies.

This leaves us with "something blue." To use the colours associated with the United Kingdom's political spectrum, "blue" represents the right. If Bernhard Bayerlein is correct that Stalin favoured an anti-Western alliance with the Nazi Party and assorted ultra-nationalist, then the colours of Stalinism include "blue" too. But his, in my view at least, needs further research in the vast archival legacy historians have been presented with since 1990. The revolution is dead; long live the (archival) revolution.[97]

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